



I am ready to succeed.

ARIZONA'S SCHOOL READINESS ACTION PLAN



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MY FELLOW ARIZONANS:

Imagine a future in which all children enter the first grade ready to succeed. Imagine children who have all had quality early experiences, children who are immunized and excited to learn, with teachers who are enthusiastic and eager to instruct. Imagine a state that is the envy of the nation with our ability to attract top-notch industry and workers because of our excellent educational system.

What follows is a five-year action plan developed by the State School Readiness Board to enable all children to enter first grade safe, healthy and ready to succeed. It is a plan that recognizes the value of working cooperatively to create the best possible outcomes for children. It is a plan that can make Arizona a state others aspire to in caring for their own early learners.

I commend the dedicated citizens who envisioned how our state can move forward, and I wholeheartedly endorse the 10 steps outlined in the plan. Special thanks go out to The Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust and the Whiteman Foundation, whose generous financial support made it possible to print and distribute this important plan. This plan is achievable because it is not the work of one, but the work and vision of many, including policy makers, community leaders and groups, educators and families. Preparing our children for school is not the responsibility of one entity; all of us have a responsibility to bear, and all of us have a stake in the outcome.

Arizona is already a great state in which to grow old. Now let's make it a great state in which to grow up.

Yours very truly,

Governor Janet Napolitano



OUR VISION: ALL CHILDREN IN ARIZONA ENTER FIRST GRADE SAFE, HEALTHY AND READY TO SUCCEED.

What is being ready for school? There are several answers to this question. For many of us, being ready for school means our children are mature enough and eager to learn. They're excited about taking a bus or walking into a classroom for the first time. Being ready for school also means having proper immunizations, completed well-checks, singing the alphabet and counting to 10. Some of our children have already been in early learning situations that have helped to develop these skills.

While many of our children are ready for school, far too many children are sadly behind when they enter primary grades, and may never catch up. Many children enter school and have never spoken English, may come from violent situations, or live in poverty. These children have likely never been to a doctor or dentist, do not communicate well, nor have they ever sat down for a meal. Daily activities that help a child grow in their early years are very important steps that prepare them to enter kindergarten and first grade.

OUR ROLE: WE SHOULD ALL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PREPARING CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL.

- › As parents and caregivers, we build the foundation to help our children succeed in life.
- › As business people, we should invest now in our community's youngest learners to receive dividends in the future.
- › As retirees, we are here to ensure that the younger generations are prepared to succeed and grow to be healthy and productive citizens.
- › As taxpayers, we are responsible for ensuring that future generations have the same opportunities for success.
- › As Arizona residents, we need to create a quality early childhood environment to make our state a better place to live and work.

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FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNOR NAPOLITANO'S SCHOOL READINESS ACTION PLAN



RESULT

ALL CHILDREN IN ARIZONA START FIRST GRADE SAFE, HEALTHY AND READY TO SUCCEED.



INTRODUCTION

Ready Families
Parents and families are children's first teachers. This action plan supports culturally sensitive, community-based efforts to educate and inform families in critical areas of literacy, brain development, health and wellness and the importance of early learning.

Ready Programs & Schools
Quality early learning experiences can lead not only to success in elementary school, but also lead to a more productive, happy and healthy life. The actions in this plan seek to provide all children with access to high-quality early learning settings so that all children have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Ready Teachers
Early education teachers can have a profound impact on a child's potential for success, but Arizona's early education industry provides little incentive for teachers to remain in the field. This plan supports training and education for early childhood teachers, and builds strategies to increase the retention and compensation of early childhood education teachers.

Ready Communities
This action plan was conceived by community members, and its ultimate success is contingent on full engagement by parents, businesses, programs/schools and communities at every level. The action steps build public/private partnerships to create and expand capacity at the local level.

TEN ACTION STEPS

- Provide parent education and family support programs that strengthen families and promote school readiness.
- Increase health screening for Arizona children birth to 6 years old.
- Assist families who earn low wages by providing adequate funding for child care subsidies.
- Improve the quality, health and safety of early childhood education settings.
- Enhance students' chances of academic success by making voluntary full-day kindergarten available to every child.
- Phase in high-quality, state-supported preschool.
- Provide child care providers and preschools with access to a nurse health consultant.
- Increase the pool and retention of qualified early childhood professionals.
- Create public/private partnerships to build the capacity of local communities to provide quality early childhood education.
- Coordinate early childhood education functions between state agencies, Head Start and Tribes.

STRATEGIES

- Expand Healthy Families, maintain Family Literacy, increase parent education, improve knowledge of early brain and child development, support early literacy.
- Increase well-child screens (medical, developmental, behavioral, oral), immunize all children, train health professionals on screening and child care staff on oral health, conduct hearing screenings on all newborns.
- Maintain caseload growth and eliminate waiting list to allow low-income working families to afford care for their children.
- Offer child care providers technical assistance to improve quality, phase in quality rating system, ensure sufficient monitoring of health and safety, improve infant-toddler care.
- Phase in full-day kindergarten over 5 years beginning with schools with a high percentage of children on the free/reduced lunch program.
- Expand supply of preschool. Redirect Early Childhood Block Grant to high-quality preschool.
- Phase in a health consultant system to improve child and staff health and safety by providing access to a healthcare professional.
- Develop professional development system, provide scholarships to improve number, diversity and quality of early education teachers, phase in wage incentive program, establish Early Educators Leadership Program.
- Establish AZ Early Education Fund, recruit Advisory Committee, raise private donations, galvanize business leaders, build quality early childhood education at local level, empower families, instill foundation for reading.
- Coordinate and maximize efficiency of early childhood education functions under auspices of the State School Readiness Board, develop Accountability System to report indicators and for continuous system improvement.



WHO IS THE ANSWER? ALL OF US.

We can all get involved and help our children succeed by taking any of the following steps:

FOR PARENTS AND/OR CAREGIVERS:

- > Take children to healthcare providers for check-ups, immunizations and screenings.
- > Read to children; listen to children.
- > Ensure that children eat nutritiously.
- > Take care of ourselves.
- > Provide a warm and nurturing home environment.
- > Choose high-quality early learning programs.

IN OUR COMMUNITIES:

- > Visit or volunteer at a local early education program or school.
- > Help families who earn low wages to afford quality child care.
- > Ask our business and community networks to support the actions in this plan.
- > Support early education teachers in their ongoing development.
- > Create your own community school readiness board; adapt the goals to fit your own community's special needs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- > Call the School Readiness Board for more information or for a group presentation.



ARIZONA STATE BOARD ON SCHOOL READINESS

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES

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